



Opinion Columnists

search site go Web Search powered by YAHOO! SEARCH

Home » Opinion » **Opinion Columnists**

Ethanoland food

American farmers are not causing Third World famine

CLIFF MAY, Scripps Howard
Friday, May 9, 2008

It's become the conventional wisdom and William Tucker, writing in The Weekly Standard, expressed it most eloquently: "Right now, we're trying to run our cars on corn ethanol instead of gasoline. As a result, we suddenly find ourselves taking food out of the mouths of children in developing nations. That may sound harsh, but it also happens to be true."

The suggestion is that American farmers are growing corn primarily to feed children in the Third World. And since people in these nations lack not only food but also money, it assumes that American taxpayers must buy this corn and pay to ship it to them.

STORY TOOLS

E-mail story
Comments
iPod friendly
Printer friendly

MORE OPINION COLUMNISTS

Scrambled confession
Ones left standing
Best gift for Mother's Day is to spend time mothering

Implicit in this argument is the notion that developing nations are not developing, and never will be. Instead, they must depend on Americans for basic subsistence. Is this the model that we accept and envision for the future?

As a reporter, I've witnessed famines. I know what a nightmare they are. When a famine occurs, there is nothing to do but get food as quickly as possible to the starving. But it is a mistake to view famine as the natural state of the "developing" world, to believe that people must remain helpless.

People often think that relief and development are a single discipline. They are more opposite. Development

means helping people learn to produce food for themselves. With a little development, a nation can avoid famine. Relief is what you provide when development fails.

But the moment you send free food, you collapse local prices and pauperize farmers who have managed to raise crops and who want to sell them.

In Africa, where I once served as a New York Times bureau chief, people are not poor because they are unwilling to work hard or because they can't master agricultural skills, or because the land lacks the potential to produce bounty. They are poor because they are oppressed by governments.

If Third World governments and their enablers are the primary cause of hunger, the secondary cause is the spiraling price of oil. This is making it too expensive for small farmers to run tractors, buy fertilizer and transport their surplus crops to market.

Most Americans understand that we need to begin to replace oil as our only transportation fuel. Our national security and long-term economic health depend on it.

The most promising competitors to oil at this moment are alcohol fuels made from a variety of sources (not just corn). Brazil, which uses sugar cane to make an alternative to gasoline, imports no foreign oil — and Brazil is not experiencing food shortages.

Other developing countries could follow this model. Instead of importing American food as charity, they could be importing American farm equipment at market prices, the better to both feed themselves and produce additional products for export.

But the regimes that profit most from high oil prices want none of this. So they are selling the notion that alternative fuels are impractical or environmentally disastrous.

Buyers beware.



mostpopular

Ten most e-mailed stories from Evansville courierpress.com:

Allergy-free food at Holiday World
'Rocky' auction
Medical student accused of dealing mushrooms
A vow Fulfilled
Newburgh woman killed in car crash
Police: Woman shoots at estranged boyfriend
Larry Bird suit filed
Newspaper carrier carjacked
Helfrich makes Superman finals
Reaching their potential

Refinance Now at 5.1% FIXED!
\$200,000 mortgage under \$599/mo. No SSN
req. Compare 4 FREE quotes!
www.FetchARate.com

Cash For Your Settlement
Don't Wait For Periodic Payments, Get Your
Payment In One Lump Sum!
www.jgwentworth.com

Accredited Online Degrees
Move your career forward with an Accredited
Online Degree! Get info.
www.CourseAdvisor.com

